

**MONTANA**

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**LOCAL ADVISORY  
COUNCILS FOR  
VOCATIONAL/TECHNICAL  
EDUCATION**

**FUNCTIONS  
AND  
ACTIVITIES**

**Member's Guide**

## **Advisory Council Responsibilities in A Changing World**

Perhaps no period in history has provided greater challenges or presented greater opportunity for Montana's vocational education programs and delivery systems than the present. Major changes are occurring in the workforce; shifting demographics, rapidity of technological change, and globalization of economic competition. These changes will necessitate educational entities to revise, update, and modernize programs consistent with employer and individual needs. As vocational administrators and educators strive for excellence and viability of programs, they must insure that local advisory councils are an integral part and a dynamic force in process and program development. Advisory councils are the catalysts, the key for program relevancy. They serve as a crucial link between the training institutions and the community, and most importantly, contribute significantly in identifying and developing training programs to fully maximize human potential.

Jim Fitzpatrick, Executive Director  
Montana Council on Vocational Education, *March 1990*

# **FOREWORD**

This guide was developed to answer some of the major questions frequently asked by local vocational technical education advisory council members concerning their role, function, and responsibilities

The membership guide addresses the following questions:

- What is an Advisory Council?
- Why are they needed?
- What are their functions & activities?
- How are they established?
- What is expected from members?
- How often do they meet?
- How can councils initiate change?
- How to keep a council effective?

## **WHAT ARE THEY?**

Local vocational technical advisory councils are formal groups of volunteers that collectively advise specific vocational technical instructional programs at the secondary or postsecondary level. Members are drawn primarily from the private sector and share a working knowledge of the job tasks and competencies specific to the instructional program. Advisory councils have no administrative authority, but work cooperatively with school officials in advising and supporting technical education.

## **WHY ARE THEY NEEDED?**

Effective, quality vocational technical instructional programs require ongoing interaction with individuals representing the community and the labor market. Input from people knowledgeable of specific occupational areas can help assure that up-to-date

instruction is being offered. Today's dynamic work environment demands vocational graduates who understand today's technologies. Advisory councils can help vocational programs meet this challenge.

## **WHAT ARE THEIR FUNCTIONS & ACTIVITIES?**

Successful advisory councils provide advice on many different issues relative to the vocational program. Examples of common advisory council functions and activities are listed below, followed by a more comprehensive listing:

- Curriculum evaluation
- Facility and equipment reviews
- Instructional resource coordination
- Student placement
- Analyzing work community needs
- Identifying new technologies
- Program promotion and public relations
- Long and short range planning
- Student organizations
- Business/industry linkages
- Programs of work
- Recommendation reports

### **Public Relation Activities**

- Promote community awareness of vocational technical education through effective media coverage and marketing efforts.
- Make formal presentations of vocational education programs and activities to civic and service groups.
- Establish scholarships and financial aid programs for deserving students.

- Establish awards programs to recognize outstanding students, teachers, administrators, and community leaders.
- Promote media coverage of special events, make presentations to curriculum committees and school board meetings.

### **Curriculum Activities**

- Review curriculum materials for state-of-the-art content.
- Identify competency levels and performance standards.
- Recommend technical resource personnel.
- Provide classroom speakers from business and industry.
- Recommend and/or provide tours and field trip experiences.
- Assist instructors in obtaining instructional supplies and equipment.
- Review curriculum to insure basic skills content.
- Assist in securing adequate funding of vocational technical education programs.
- Recommend realistic safety policies.
- Recommend instructional materials, equipment, and facilities for serving specialized training needs.

### **Community Resource Activities**

- Identify community resource people.
- Recommend tours and field trip experiences.
- Recommend speakers.

### **Recruitment Activities**

- Assist in reviewing teacher selection criteria.
- Assist in recruiting new staff.
- Assist in recruiting new students – secondary, postsecondary, and adult.

### **Student Organization Activities**

- Assist in developing competitive skill events.
- Judge competitive skill events.
- Sponsor student organization activities.
- Sponsor or collect contributions of equipment and supplies for skill events.
- Arrange for display space to promote student organizations and special events.

### **Job Placement Activities**

- Organize employer/student conferences.
- Notify teachers of job openings for students.
- Provide students with cooperative training sites.
- Promote potential cooperative training sites with other employers.
- Assist students in developing interviewing skills.
- Recommend employability skills curriculum content.
- Conduct occupational surveys.

### **Staff Development Activities**

- Provide in-service activities on current methods and processes for instructors.
- Provide skilled technicians to supplement teacher's experience.
- Support participation of instructors in technical workshops or factory schools.

### **Program Review and Evaluation Activities**

- Review program goals and objectives.
- Participate on program evaluation teams.
- Compare program accomplishments with program objectives.

- Compare student performance standards to business/industry standards.
- Review adequacy of facility as a training site.
- Evaluate quality and quantity of graduates and job placement.
- Make recommendations for program improvement.
- Give periodic reports to administration or school boards.

### **Legislative**

- Provide tours for legislators through vocational technical training facilities.
- Communicate with legislators about vocational technical education needs.
- Gather information on new legislation.
- Promote legislative support for vocational technical education.

## **HOW ARE THEY ESTABLISHED?**

Advisory council formation usually begins with program instructors and the school administration outlining the role, function, and purposes of the advisory group. An organizational plan is then drawn up and if needed, governing board approval is secured.

The organizational plan should include council objectives and rationale, membership criteria and composition, officer positions, meeting frequency, and member responsibilities.

Effective, quality vocational technical instructional programs require ongoing interaction with individuals representing the community and the labor market. Input from individuals knowledgeable of specific occupational areas can help assure that relevant, up-to-date instruction is taking place. Today's vocational technical instructional programs cannot afford to be out of touch with the labor environment they are

serving. Consequently, advisory councils usually have from 5 to 15 members that represent a cross section of the employment community. Employers, employees, students, parents, and minority groups should be represented. Letters of appointment are sent by appropriate school officials to those nominated to serve. It is suggested that initial term members be appointed on a staggered term basis of one to three years. This staggered arrangement helps maintain experience within the group.

## **WHAT IS EXPECTED FROM THE MEMBERS?**

Advisory council members are expected to:

- Attend all regular council meetings.
- Offer advice, time and energy.
- Represent their constituencies.
- Serve on special work committees.
- Share their expertise with the council.
- Work with their peers to improve the instructional program.
- Possess knowledge about the work community.

## **HOW OFTEN DO THEY MEET?**

Advisory councils typically meet from 2 to 4 times per year, depending on the program of activities and the distance the members have to travel to attend. Successful councils meet regularly with meeting dates and times planned in advance. In addition, pre-planned agendas focusing on particular topics or work activities should be sent to all members prior to the meeting date.

## **HOW CAN COUNCILS INITIATE CHANGE?**

Making recommendations is one of the advisory council's most important functions. This is the mechanism the council has available to insure the vocational technical program is meeting today's instructional



challenges and will continue to serve the work community in an effective manner.

Advisory councils are encouraged to make recommendations after they have thoroughly discussed specific issues. Recommendations should be brief, clear, and indicate to the faculty and administration what specific action needs to be taken. A written rationale may be included with the recommendations. It is important that both council and the administration view the recommendations as strictly advisory in nature. Some councils elect to present their recommendations in an annual evaluation report while others may submit theirs as they see fit. Recommendations should also be reflected in the council minutes. It is unrealistic for the council to expect the administration to accept all recommendations. However, the administration should respect the council's advice and inform the council why any recommendations were denied.

## **HOW TO KEEP COUNCILS EFFECTIVE?**

Advisory councils need to remain vibrant and to continually provide the instructional program with sound "real world" advice. Members should feel they are contributing to the community and are not merely spectators of the educational process. There are many ways to keep an advisory council healthy and functioning the way it was designed to. Here are some suggestions to keep a council viable:

- (1) Keep the council members informed of developments within the vocational technical program and the institution. School newsletters and invitations to key meetings and school events are encouraged.
- (2) Insure that the council is meeting for a definite reason and inform the group in advance about the agenda.
- (3) Strive to recognize the council members for serving.
- (4) Publicly recognize the council members for their service.
- (5) Adhere to meeting agendas and stay within established timelines.
- (6) Make sure the program's administrative personnel understand the role of advisory councils and what motivates people

serve on them. (7) Work to see that the council has a real voice and that they are not solely participants in the education process. (8) Encourage the election of a responsible chairperson.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This “Guide for Local Advisory Council Members” was developed by the Montana Council on Vocational Education in 1990. The council’s major responsibilities included advising the Governor, Sole State Agent for Vocational Education, and the business community on policies and initiatives that should be undertaken to strengthen and modernize vocational technical education.

At the time, The Montana Council expressed their appreciation to Tom Welch, Assistant Professor, Department of Agriculture and Mechanical Technology, Northern Montana College, Havre, MT, for his input, and to State Councils on Vocational Education, especially the North Dakota and Colorado Councils, for sharing information for the development of this guide.

## **Council Membership Do's and Don't's**

<b><u>DO</u></b>	<b><u>DON'T</u></b>
<b>Make a commitment.</b>	<b>“Wait and See.”</b>
<b>Attend meetings.</b>	<b>Have a record of absenteeism.</b>
<b>Stick to the agenda – meet for a purpose.</b>	<b>Waste others’ time.</b>
	<b>Add to the “wish list.”</b>
<b>Align recommendations with viable resources.</b>	<b>Usurp school administrators’ or board’s authority.</b>
<b>Advise when improvement desired.</b>	<b>Fail to suggest alternative solutions.</b>
<b>Be a fact finder.</b>	<b>Be a fault-finder.</b>
<b>Make recommendations for a job well done.</b>	<b>Be afraid to give recognition.</b>
<b>Invite opinions.</b>	<b>Avoid those who disagree.</b>
<b>Develop a group rapport.</b>	<b>Remain in isolation.</b>
<b>Consider a variety of subjects.</b>	<b>Impose pre-established, personal opinions.</b>
<b>Establish priorities.</b>	<b>“Bite off more than you can chew.”</b>